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An Alternative for
GATEWAY NATIONAL RECREATION AREA



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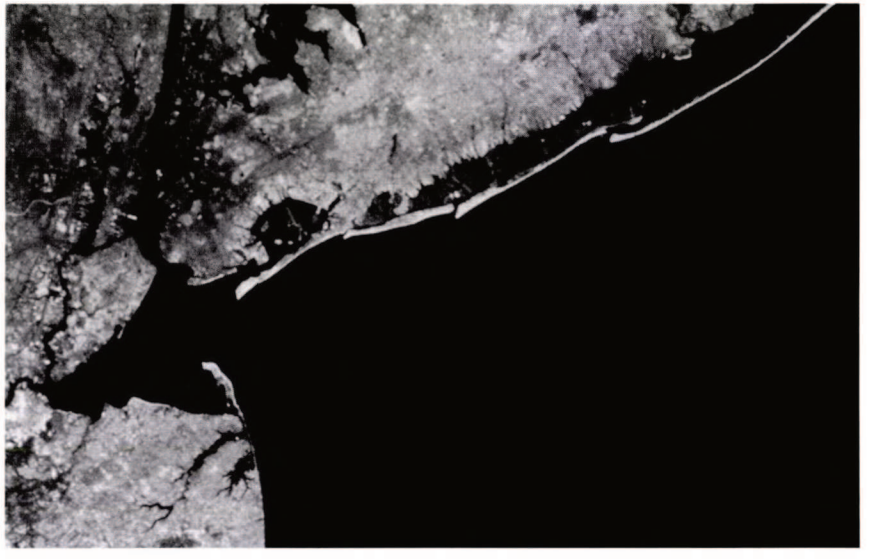
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An Alternative for
GATEWAY NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

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LANDSAT IMAGE OF THE NEW YORK/NEW JERSEY HARBOR

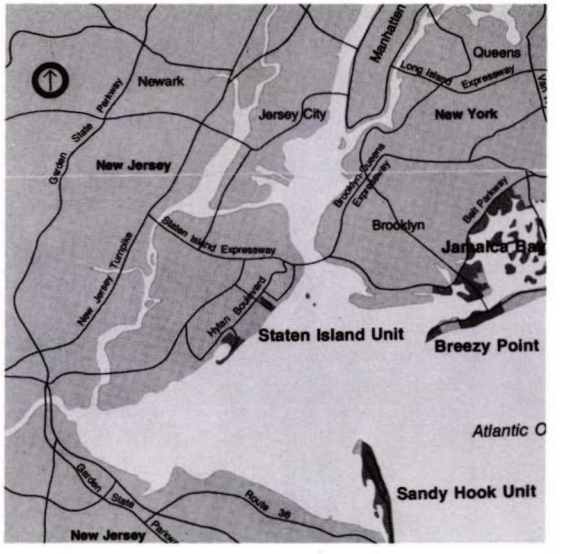
FOREWORD

This study of the future of Gateway National Recreation Area is the product of student work in a graduate-level studio at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. The project has been supported by a cooperative agreement between the Graduate School of Design (GSD) and the National Park Service North Atlantic Region Office under which various studies and research activities of mutual interest are undertaken. There is, however, no contractual or consultative relationship between the National Park Service and the GSD, its faculty or students. The work presented is the full responsibility of the thirteen students who were members of the studio group.

This summary of the group's findings presents issues, planning strategies, and design proposals based on the conditions and options facing the Gateway lands and the National Park Service today. The primary function of this study is one of education: for the students who will become professionals in landscape architecture and planning; for the National Park Service, which has full responsibility for developing plans and policies for the Gateway National Recreation Area; and for the citizens of the New York/New Jersey harbor region who may benefit from the insights and ideas developed by the studio group.

Carl F. Steinitz
Alexander and Victoria Wiley Professor
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Editor

INTRODUCTION



GATEWAY STUDY AREA

The entrance to the greater New York harbor is formed by Sandy Hook in New Jersey and Breezy Point in New York. This has been the gateway to the United States of America for millions of immigrants and visitors. Today, 20 million people live within an hour's drive of the harbor's shores.

Gateway National Recreation Area was established by an act of Congress in 1972, drawing together a collection of previously unrelated sites. This made the National Park Service responsible for many of the outer harbor lands, including the Sandy Hook peninsula, areas of the harbor shore of Staten Island, most of Breezy Point and land in the area of Jamaica Bay. The sites total 26,000 acres of land and water with great unrealized potential as natural, recreational and educational assets.

The GSD studio's involvement with Gateway began at the invitation of the National Park Service. It recognized numerous problems in the management of such diverse and discontiguous sites: the lack of a coherent unifying image; underutilized opportunities for conservation, recreation, and education; and inadequate capital and maintenance appropriations to meet ambitious planning objectives. By performing a new study of the Gateway units, the studio group aimed to clearly define the problems and opportunities that face the National Park Service as it determines a future for the Gateway National Recreation Area.





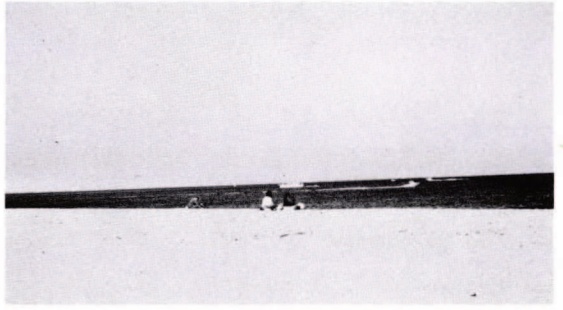
The project began with a site visit, where students met with Gateway visitors and National Park Service personnel. The incredible diversity of sites was noted as the most dominant feature. Sites range from rich wildlife habitats to former military installations, from popular beaches to inaccessible toxic landfills, from grand urban parks to abandoned airport runways. Gateway National Recreation Area contains some of the last natural remnants of the New York/New Jersey area's original shoreline, some of its most intensively used recreational facilities, and many unused or underutilized cultural resources. The juxtaposition of the natural environment against the urban backdrop was identified as the most powerful recurring image; the essence of Gateway.

In attempting to first define the problem, the studio group considered whether the sites could, if in fact they should, ever be unified by the programming and design of each site specifically.

The perimeter of Gateway was studied in an attempt to determine how the areas are viewed from the transportation networks that lead to and from the sites. The highways, subways, buses, water and bicycle routes and even the air traffic above it were all considered.

Five areas that were identified as critically important within Gateway were then explored in detail: Sandy Hook, a barrier beach with numerous military installations, which is heavily used for ocean bathing; the sites on







Staten Island, Great Kills Park and Miller Field, which support diverse recreational activities; Jamaica Bay, one of the largest estuaries on the Atlantic Coast, which serves as a prime wildlife refuge; Jacob Riis Park, a well-known beach recreation area, which contains a historic bathhouse; and Floyd Bennett Field, the site of New York City's first municipal airport.

The studio group concluded that Gateway can and should be viewed as one place. The unifying aspect of its image was determined by its location in the margin of land where the city meets the sea. The studio group determined that what is made of this edge zone—via the National Park Service and other public agencies—will reveal a great deal about the relationship of people to nature, and about the city to its setting.

The Perimeter



Existing entry to Great Kills Park



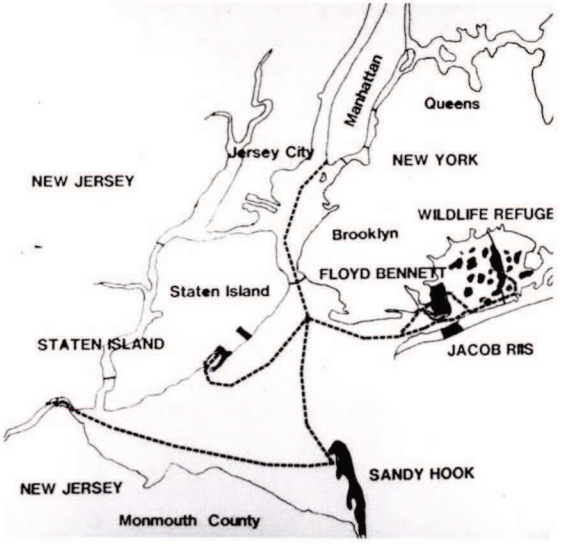
Proposed entry and edge landscape at Floyd Bennett Field

Gateway's inaccessibility and lack of identifying images were identified as two considerations that contribute to its disunification and lack of identity.

Access to Gateway's several management units by public transportation is very difficult. The IND line, which passes through part of the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, is the only subway line that comes in direct contact with the park. A Gateway stop, however, does not exist. Some visitors come by bus, but numerous connections must be made to reach Gateway, making this an awkward procedure for most people. Almost all visitors, therefore, must come by private automobile.

The edges of the Gateway units are often unmarked and unidentifiable. Entrances usually fail to give a sense of park image and frequently express a derelict quality. The signs are inconsistent in style and in the wording of messages. Poor maintenance of surrounding vegetation often hinders sign visibility.

Design solutions proposed by the group include the creation of traditional park-like landscapes throughout the sites, using the landscape itself as a sign of announcement, identity and welcome. A more consistent landscape policy for edges and entrances of the several units would help to create a Gateway image. Cooperation with the City of New York for a similar edge treatment on related, but non-park parcels such as on the other side of the Belt Parkway, would amplify the impact.



PROPOSED FERRY ROUTES

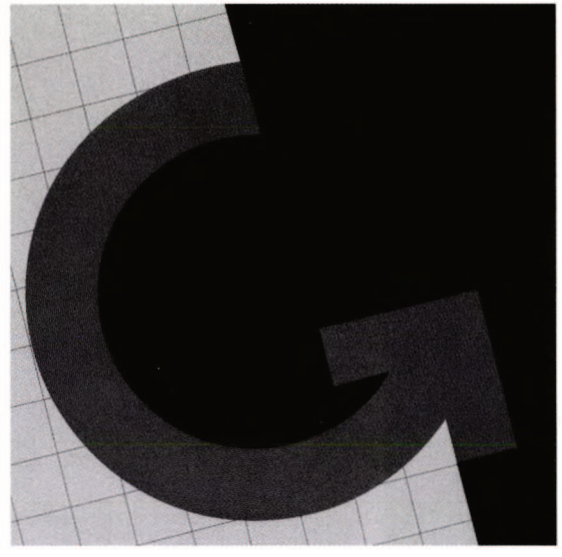


"BIG BIRD"

Millions of people fly over Gateway each year without knowing it. The toxic Fountain and Pennsylvania Avenue landfills, located near Kennedy Airport, are highly visible and cannot be used by park visitors. The group proposed a new sign—a bird form created from grassland and shrubs on the Fountain Avenue landfill—that would identify Gateway to air travelers.

In an effort to make Gateway more accessible from the city, a ferry system linked to existing public transportation was proposed. Arriving by water would be in itself a recreational experience for visitors, and it would reinforce the park's relationship to the harbor as well; an essential element in the identity of Gateway.

The Sign System



Gateway logo

A sign system was proposed to create a consistent identity among the diverse park units. The present signs, often inaccessible in placement and inconsistent in style, give no indication that the separate units are part of a larger system that is operated by the National Park Service. The poorly maintained park edges and overgrown vegetation around the signs establish a negative message.

Addressing this problem, a logo and sign system were developed. On the logo, a green G represents Gateway's position as the landscape between the grid of the city and the ocean. The logo is part of a flexible sign system that would be usable in a variety of ways—on the site as well as off. It could also be applied to a wide variety of promotional uses by the National Park Service, helping to advertise Gateway's presence and image to the public.

Icons of the individual park units were incorporated into the system as well. Regional highways were analyzed for key locations to announce Gateway. For example, a sign for the Wildlife Refuge was proposed for a location on the Belt Parkway to make it one of the first signs seen on the drive into New York City from Kennedy Airport.

Another strategy was to locate a sign so that it would be seen a few seconds before an attractive view of water or natural landscape. By placing the sign right before the view, the borrowed landscape would serve as an announcement for Gateway.

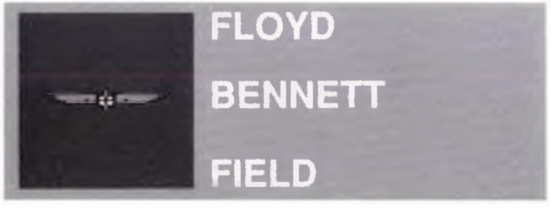






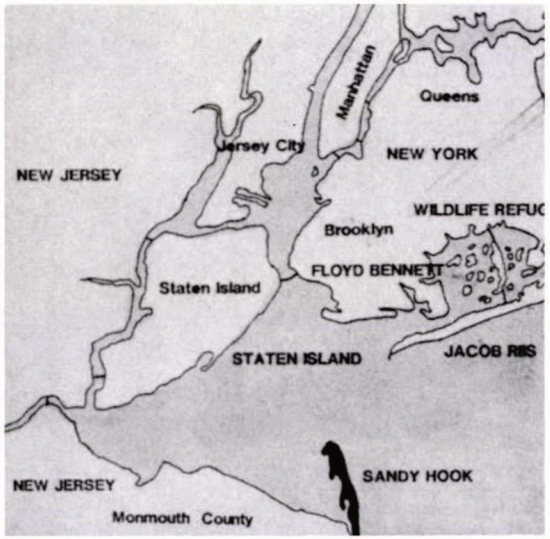






In addition to identifying park areas managed by the National Park Service, the distinctive logo and sign style could also be adapted to signs for other outer harbor amenities, thus expanding the public's perception of the Gateway concept to include the entire outer harbor.





The Sandy Hook unit is a four-mile-long peninsula that is used primarily during the summer. Close to 30,000 people use its beaches on peak days. Its 1,665 acres were previously occupied by a military reservation and a New Jersey state park, and it is the site of the oldest working lighthouse in the United States.

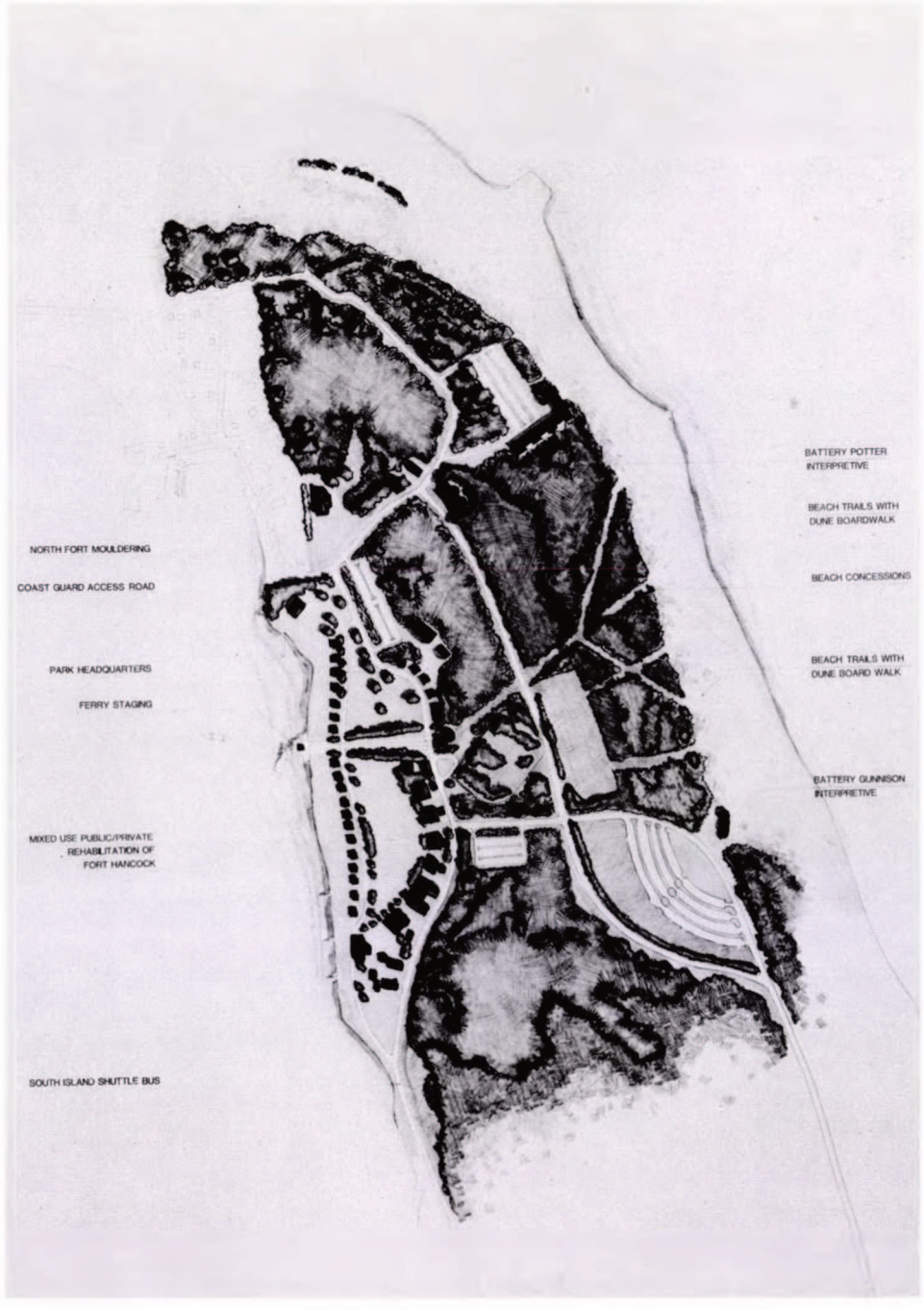
In addition to the lighthouse, the area's cultural heritage includes a historic lifesaving station and 200 years of military installations and testing grounds, including the ruins of dozens of artillery batteries. Fort Hancock's Officers Row, formerly officers' housing, stands in processional alignment facing Sandy Hook Bay. Unfortunately, due to inadequate funding, these rich cultural resources have been allowed to deteriorate to the point where a large-scale capital investment is critical to insure their preservation.

The barrier beach landform of Sandy Hook has evolved continuously throughout recorded history. Natural forces are now severely eroding the existing shoreline near the southern end of the hook where the concrete beach armor ends. Sandy Hook has been maintained as a peninsula through engineering, with an effective annual investment of $2 million.



Aerial view of Sandy Hook





Design proposal, northern Sandy Hook



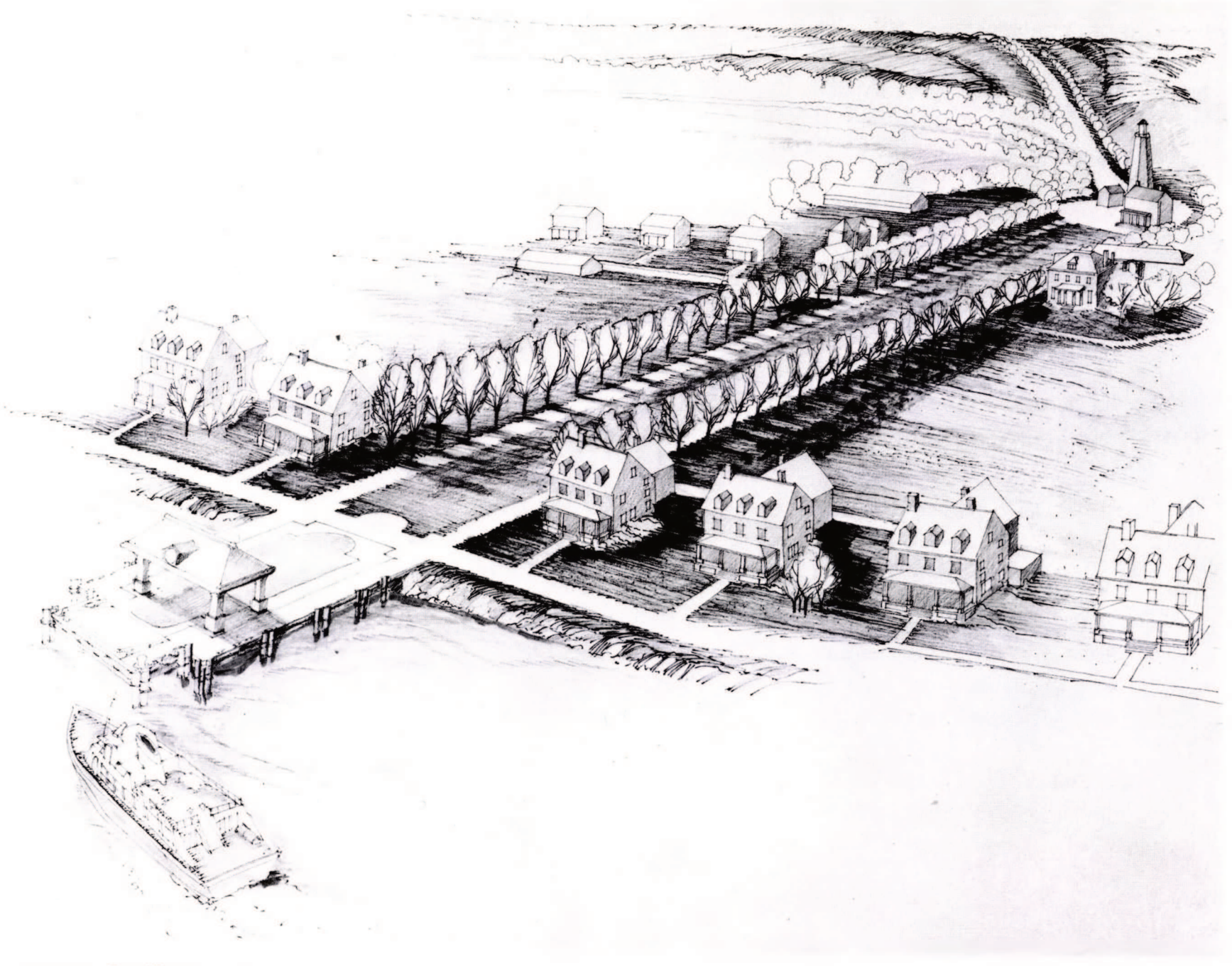
DESIGN PROPOSAL, FORT HANCOCK

The design proposal assumed that the continuous investment required to maintain the peninsula will one day no longer be feasible, and that Sandy Hook will become an island. The proposal was designed to improve the current direct vehicular access with the flexibility to eventually adapt to an island with ferry access.

The proposed ferry system would transport up to 30,000 visitors daily from the Greater Metropolitan Region of New York and New Jersey. The ferries would approach dramatic views of Fort Hancock.

At the ferry landing, visitors would enter the military village at Fort Hancock. The historic buildings would be restored through a public/ private partnership and would house an oceanographic research center, environmental education facilities and a corporate retreat.

A promenade through an allee of trees would lead the visitor from the boat landing to the lighthouse, which would serve as the new visitor center and a transition point to the shuttlebus and trails. Foot trails would lead to North Beach and shuttlebuses would be available to bring visitors to the other historical and natural features on the island. The landscape treatment would reinforce the prominence of this historic landmark.



Design proposal, Fort Hancock entry

GREAT KILLS PARK

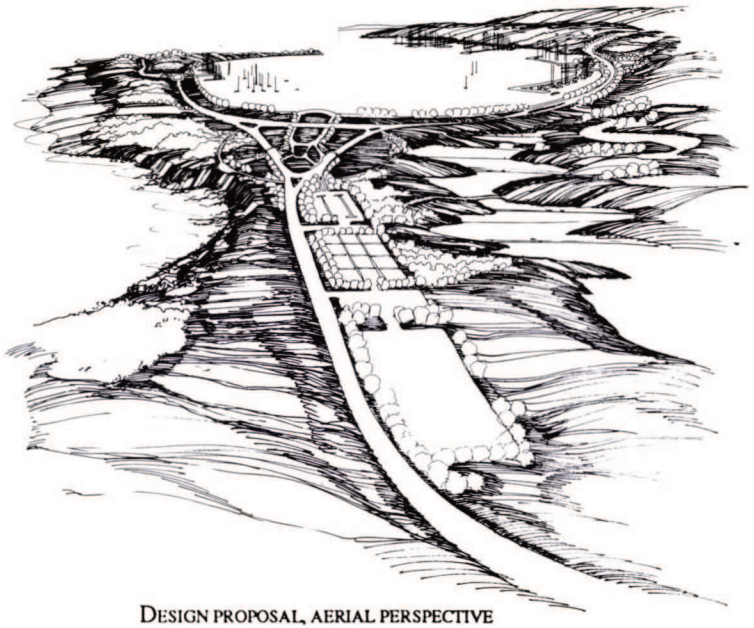




The Staten Island Unit consists of two sites along the island's southeast coast; Great Kills Park and Miller Field. Both are used primarily by residents of Staten Island.

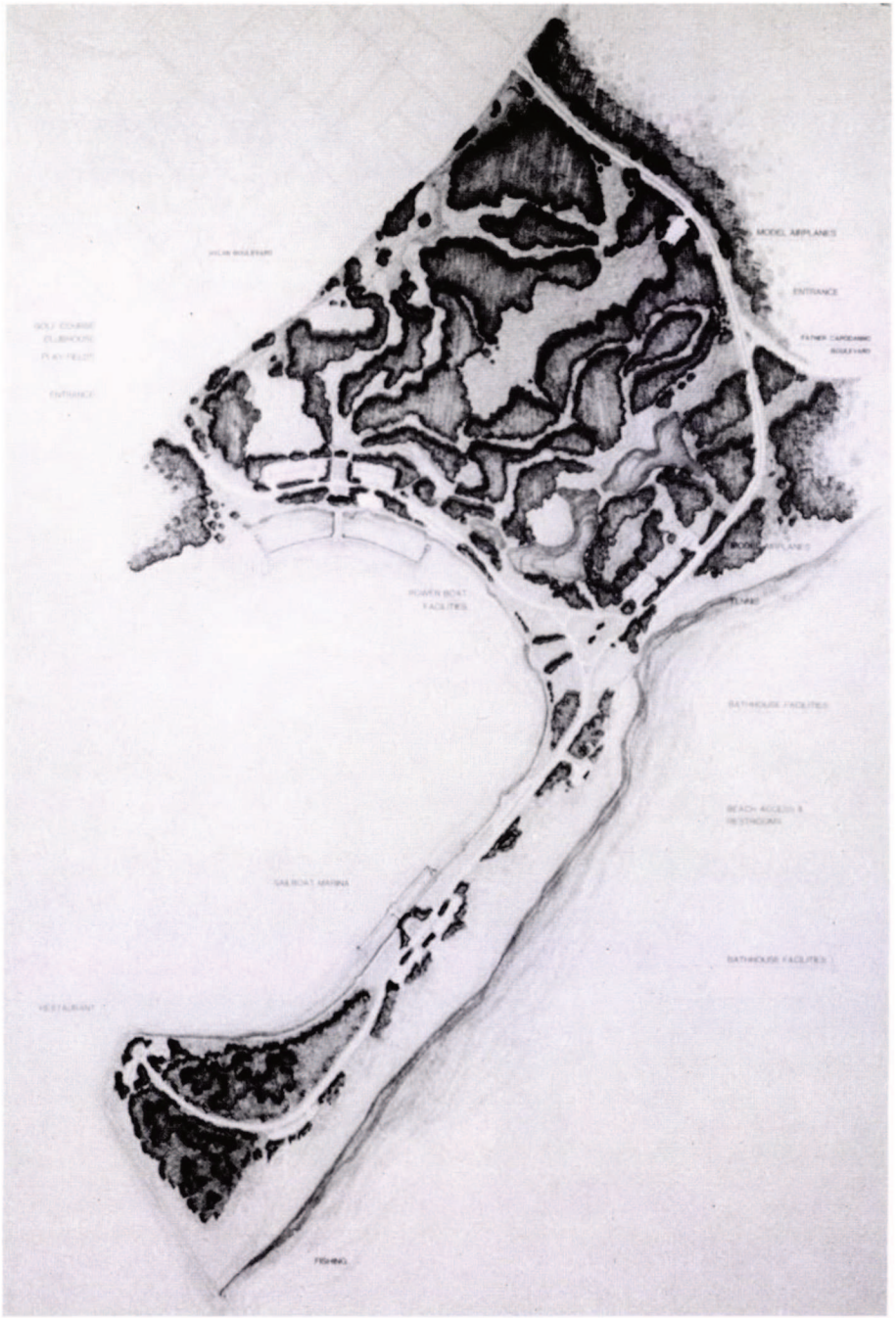
Great Kills Park, which contains a protected marina and a large beach and fishing area, was a city-owned park before becoming part of Gateway. Originally a landfill, a series of designs that began in 1929 resulted in the existing bathhouse and marina. Some special natural habitats exist within the site as well. Rapid erosion of the shoreline has now dangerously undercut the foundation of the bathhouse. The current park plans for the area assume that the erosion will continue and that the bathhouse will be lost, thus necessitating the redesign of the surrounding area.

The main entrance to Great Kills Park off Hylan Boulevard is undistinguished. In the proposed design, a new entrance with a park-like edge would be created, revealing park activities. Glimpses would be seen of the restored stream along its boundary, the golf course and large wooded areas. Earlier analysis of the controversial proposal for the extension of Father Capodanno Boulevard through the two Staten Island sites indicated that a number of positive benefits could be realized by the extension--primarily the opportunity to create new entrances that promote park image and use. The design proposals could integrate this new road, but they do not depend upon it for implementation of park improvements.



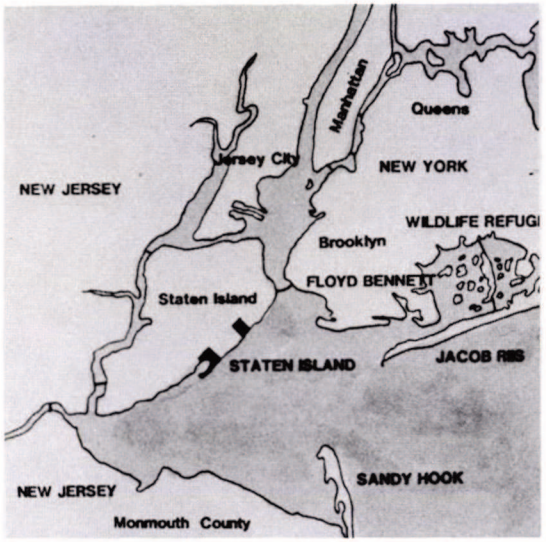
DESIGN PROPOSAL, AERIAL PERSPECTIVE

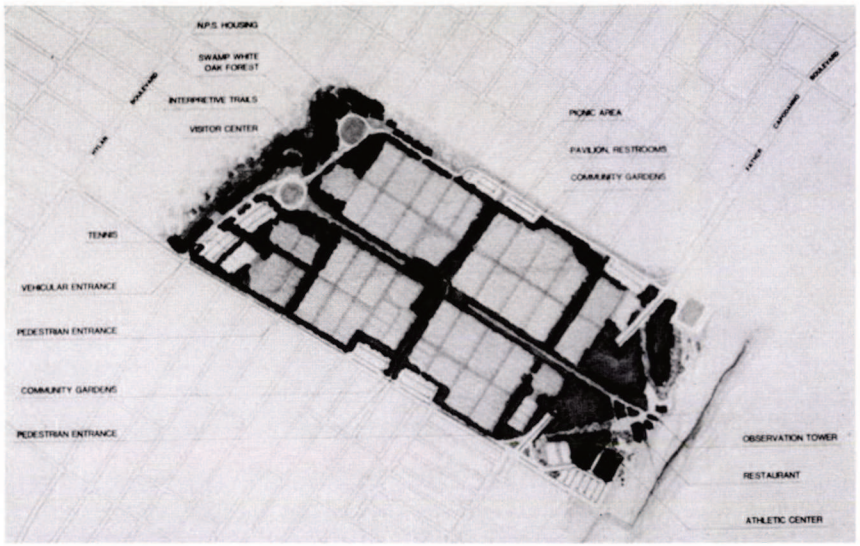
The site design proposed an additional motor boat marina, which would allow the existing marina to be used solely for sailboats and an associated restaurant. The design also contained a new perimeter road and a fresh water pond. The extensive existing parking lots have been redesigned to accommodate recreational activities. In the largely underutilized natural areas, a public golf course was proposed. The income it would generate could finance dune habitat restoration.



DESIGN PROPOSAL

MILLER FIELD





DESIGN PROPOSAL, MILLER FIELD

Miller Field was a World War II military airfield and staging area which is now used primarily as a community athletic field. The single open space is large enough to contain 40 football fields. The athletic facilities are heavily used, primarily for league play by residents of Staten Island.

The entrance off the confusing strip development of Hylan Boulevard is hard to find. The athletic field itself is not well structured. The beach at Miller Field is unappealing and its entrance unannounced.

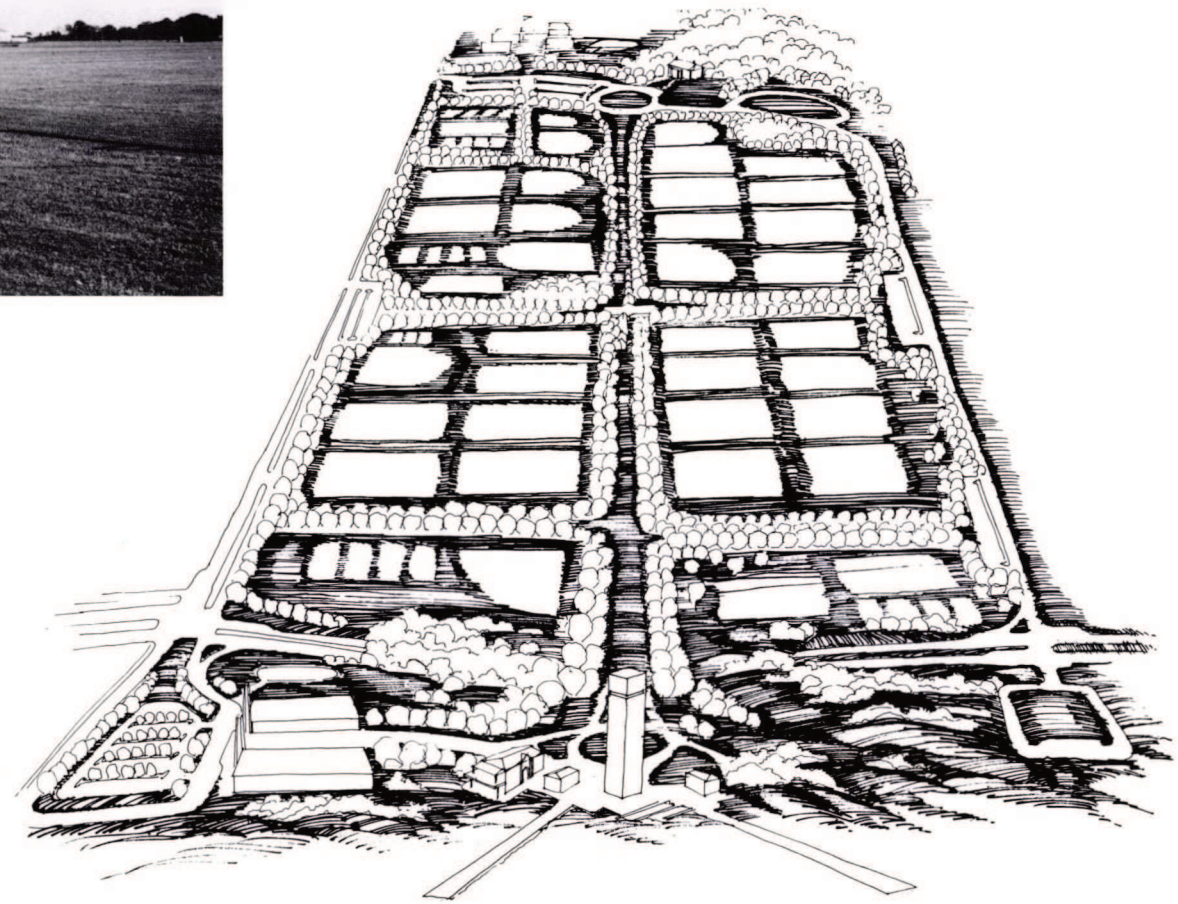
In the proposed design, the layout of the fields has been reorganized to use the space more efficiently. Plantings and berms would provide a structured organization and a clearer circulation system to access the playing fields. This plan relocated the visitor center to the Vanderbilt mansion.

Father Capodanno Boulevard passes through the site. The design would allow the driver views of the water and the historic Army lookout tower. Depressing the boulevard through the park would protect the dune habitat, while allowing uninterrupted pedestrian access to the beach.

The design proposal for the Staten Island sites recognized that members of the local community will continue to be the primary users, but that these sites can be identified with the larger Gateway system through the use of the sign system and the closer integration of the recreational and natural environments.

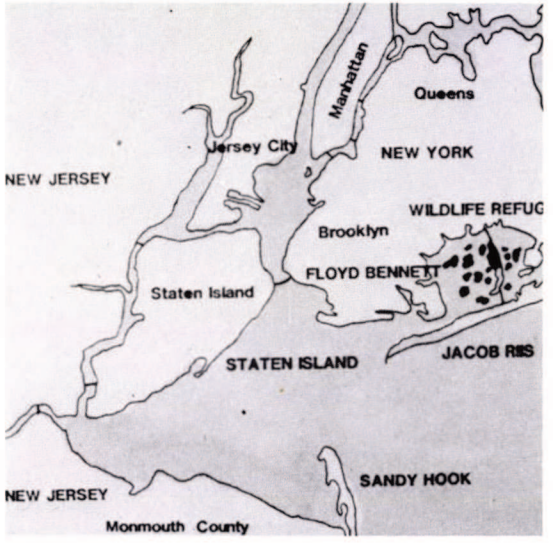


EXISTING VIEW OF PLAYING FIELDS



DESIGN PROPOSAL, AERIAL PERSPECTIVE

WILDLIFE REFUGE





AERIAL VIEW OF EAST POND AND JAMAICA BAY

The Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge covers 2,474 acres. Consisting primarily of salt water and fresh water wetlands, the area contains important bird nesting areas and serves as a stopover for migratory birds on the Eastern Flyway. The refuge was previously owned by New York City.

Jamaica Bay is one of the largest estuaries on the East Coast, and although landfill has substantially reduced the size of the bay, it still remains a significant wildlife habitat. The two freshwater ponds were created in the 1940s in order to expand and diversify the bird habitat. Over 300 different bird species have been recorded in the refuge.

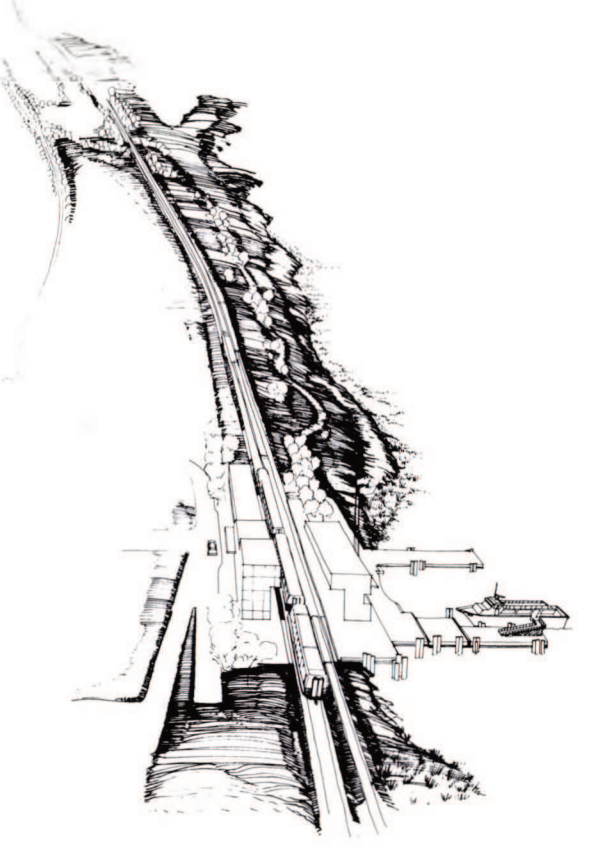
Although extremely successful as a refuge, the relative numbers of visitors are few, especially considering that more people live within five miles of Jamaica Bay than within five miles of Central Park. Although the subway passes through the site, access from the nearby subway stop is unmarked and is a difficult walk. Most visitors arrive at the refuge by automobile. The parking lot, which holds only 95 cars, is frequently filled to capacity by bird watchers.

The design intention was to better utilize the existing subway system in order to expand the use of the Gateway areas that border Jamaica Bay. The plan proposed the revitalization of the subway station at Broad Channel to serve as a visitor center and the site of a ferry dock. A foot trail system would lead bird watchers and school groups from the visitor center to the prime birding sites of the East and West Ponds.



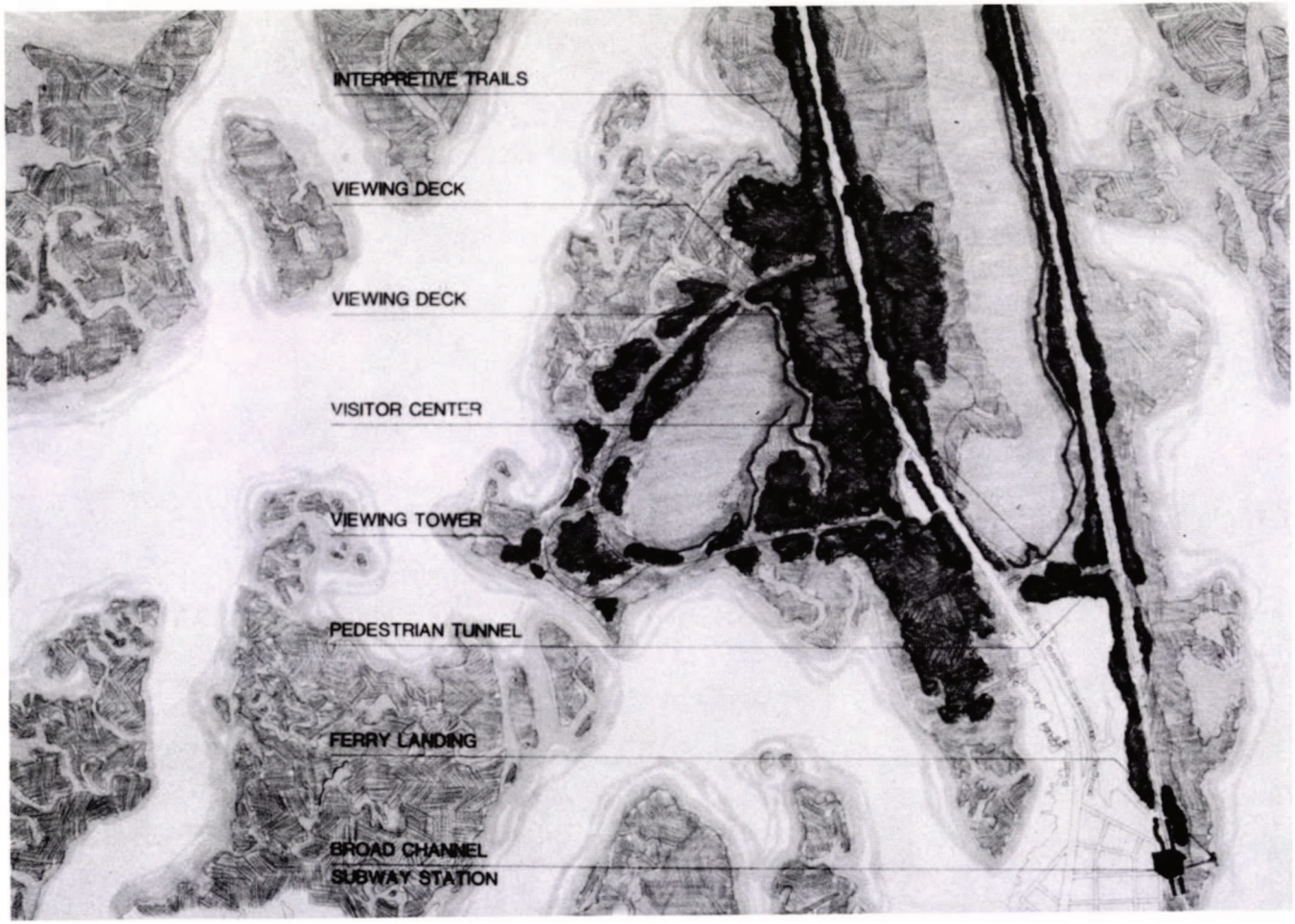
DESIGN PROPOSAL, WILDLIFE REFUGE



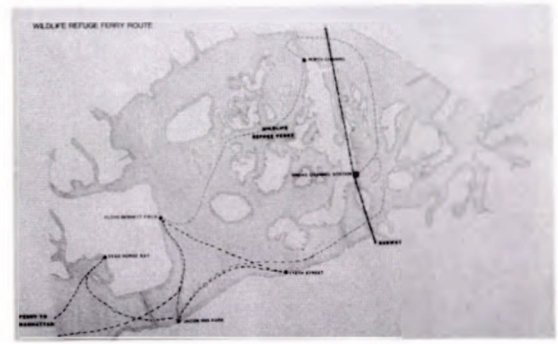


DESIGN PROPOSAL, AERIAL PERSPECTIVE OF SUBWAY STATION/FERRYLANDING AT EAST POND

extension. This would also open a navigable channel for the ferry. The ferry system would connect with Jacob Riis Park, with a large parking lot at Floyd Bennett Field, and with a ferry link to Manhattan. As mentioned before, access and increasing marine access, the design for Jamaica Bay would increase visitor use of the Wildlife Refuge without overloading existing trails or compromising bird habitat quality.



DESIGN PROPOSAL, WEST AND EAST POND



PROPOSED NATURE SIGHTSEEING FERRY ROUTE



The Breezy Point Management Unit includes Breezy Point, Fort Tilden and Jacob Riis Park. It covers 1,059 acres on a sandy peninsula extending from the eastern portion of Long Island. The Outer New York Harbor borders it to the south and the Rockaway Inlet lines its northern shore.

The western tip of Breezy Point is a sandspit with an important tern nesting habitat and fishing beaches. In an attempt to protect the sensitive tern nesting area, access to Breezy Point is limited to a restricted number of persons and fishing permits are issued on a daily basis.

Fort Tilden houses the National Park Service Unit Headquarters, and a number of abandoned bulkheads, officers' quarters and barracks. A large disturbed dune area offers potential for revitalization. Current public use of Fort Tilden revolves around environmental education and limited fishing.

Jacob Riis Park, previously owned by New York City, contains the Jacob Riis bathhouse and a portion of the design implemented by Robert Moses in 1937. It is primarily used for ocean beach recreation, with day users coming from Queens and Brooklyn. A peak summer day attracts up to 20,000 visitors, who flock the beaches, roam the boardwalks and play a popular pitch-and-putt golf course.

Now seen as an important example of park design of the 1920s and 1930s, Jacob Riis Park



AERIAL VIEW, BREEZY POINT

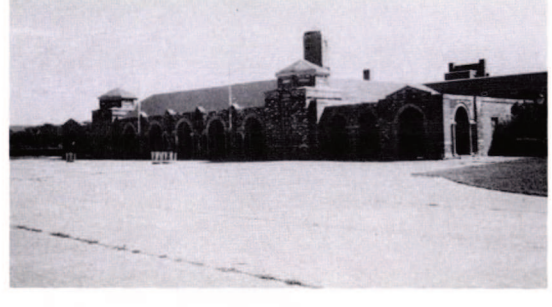


DUNES, FORT TILDEN

is remembered by New Yorkers as a premier bathing beach. Although certified as a historic landmark, the Jacob Riis bathhouse faces demolition due to neglect. The estimated $12 million required to restore the bathhouse is beyond the means of the National Park Service. The existing handball, basketball and playground facilities are all in poor repair. The parking lot, designed for 9,700 cars, has proven to be too large for the area's use in recent years and is not well maintained.



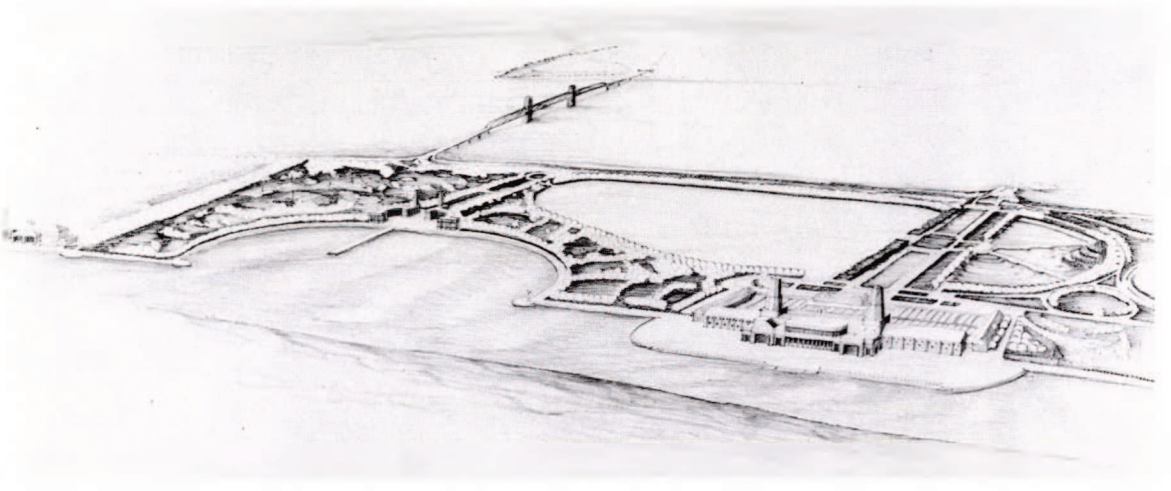
AERIAL VIEW, JACOB RIIS PARK



BATH HOUSE, JACOB RIIS PARK





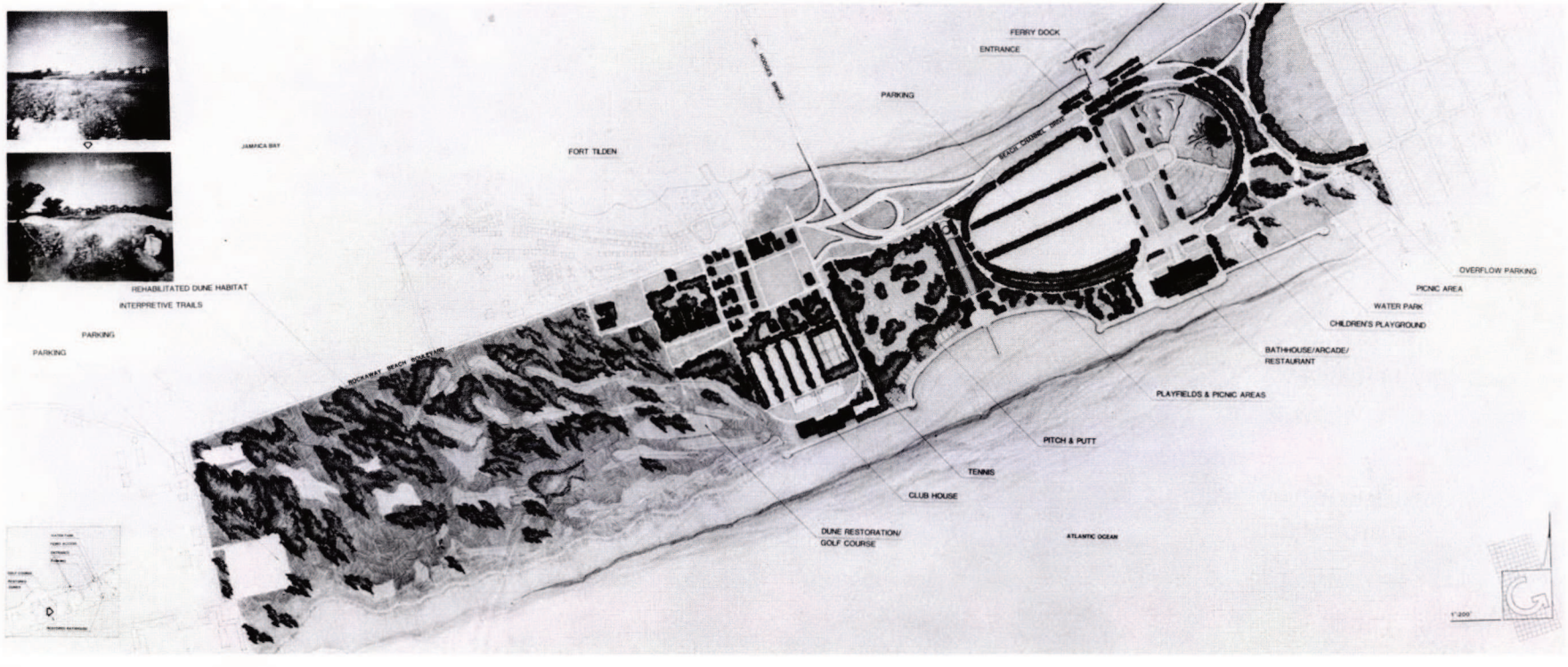


DESIGN PROPOSAL, AERIAL PERSPECTIVE OF JACOB RIIS PARK

The plan for Jacob Riis Park intended to restore the reputation and activity the park enjoyed during its heyday. In the spirit of the original design, a new waterpark was proposed to fit within the area of the existing parking lot. It would serve to attract visitors and provide funds for the revitalization of the historic bathhouse. The existing pitch-and-putt course would be flanked by handball and basketball courts and picnicking areas. The ceremonial axis that looks toward the Empire State Building would be restored as well. A new ferry landing, which would align with the impressive facade of the bathhouse, was proposed to enhance the activity that would occur in this portion of the park.

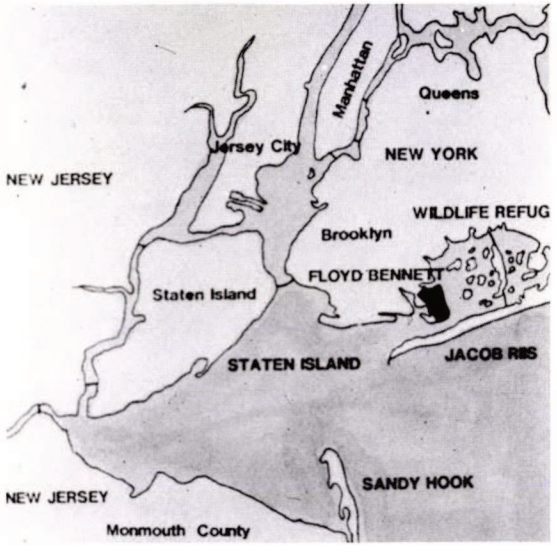
As a means of financing dune restoration at Fort Tilden, a dune golf course was proposed, with a portion of it integrated into the habitat which would be restored. Interpretive trails and environmental education would also be provided. A clubhouse and tennis courts would accompany the new golf course.

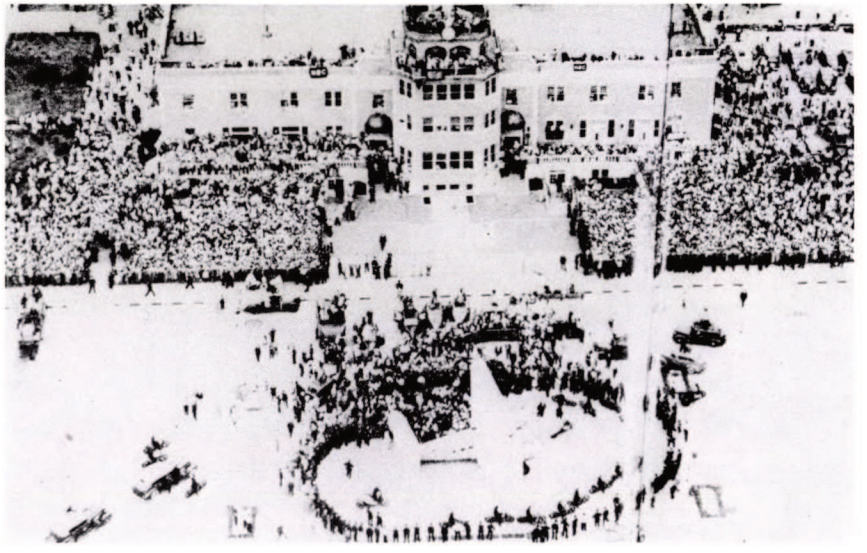
A visitor to the Breezy Point Unit and Jacob Riis Park would be able to enjoy the thrill of a water slide, the nostalgia of historically significant buildings at an excellent beach, and the experience of a wildlife environment which would restore the natural condition of the Long Island dune landscape.



DESIGN PROPOSAL, JACOB RIIS PARK

FLOYD BENNETT FIELD





Floyd Bennett Field was the first municipal airport of New York City. It was prominent in the development of experimental aviation: Wiley Post, Amelia Earhart, and Howard Hughes all flew there. Many of the original aviation-related structures and the runway system remain and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Floyd Bennett Field park unit is located at the southern end of Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn. It was created by filling Jamaica Bay. With 1,448 acres, it is nearly twice the size of Central Park.

Although created by the filling of water and wetlands, Floyd Bennett Field now contains one of the few metropolitan region's protected grassland habitats, similar to those that once covered much of Long Island. It also now includes tennis courts, a golf range, community gardens, a marina, model airplane fields and the headquarters of the Gateway National Recreation Area and its environmental education programs. Despite these activities, overall resources of this unit are vastly underutilized.

The public edge of the park seen along the Belt Parkway is composed of poorly maintained vegetation and appears derelict and unappealing. Flatbush Avenue is edged with cyclone fencing, which prohibits necessary maintenance and creates an ambiguous sense of welcome and an undefined entry.

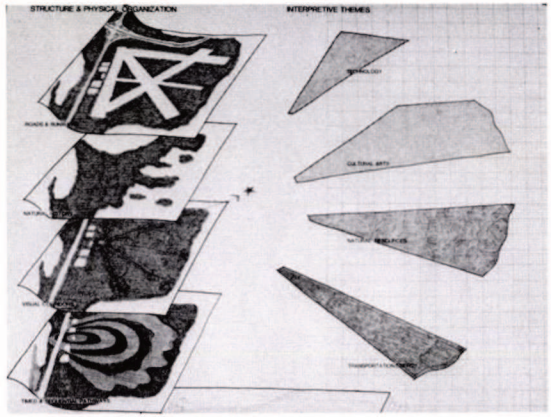


AERIAL VIEW, FLOYD BENNETT FIELD

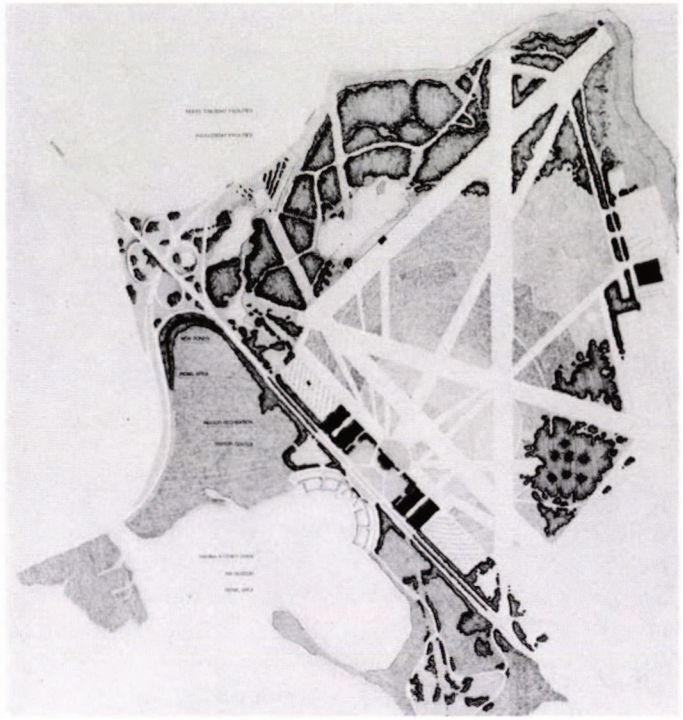
The proposal was made to create a park edge which would stimulate interest in the activities within the park. Observation towers, and water and sculptural elements would suggest the many activities to be explored.



CONTROL TOWER



DESIGN CONCEPT



DESIGN PROPOSAL, FLOYD BENNETT FIELD

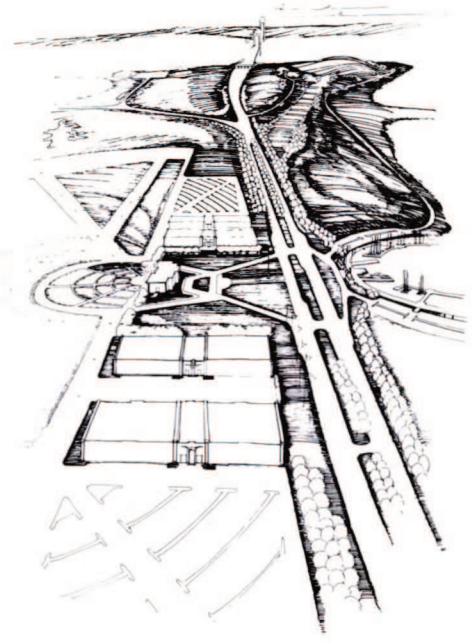
The proposal suggested a redesigned entry to the west of Flatbush Avenue to create access to the marina and adjacent parking, picnic and other recreation areas.

The main park entry would be re-introduced at the aviation buildings and redesigned in its original historic character. The control tower would become the new visitor center for Gateway. A loop road would be incorporated to expose view corridors that would reveal the park's most significant elements. The runways emphasize the large scale of the area and provide views offsite, including views to the skyline of Manhattan. Major features along the circulation route would include the Wildlife Refuge ferry terminal, a new observation tower, the inlet beach, a freshwater lake and a model sailboat pond. An amphitheatre would provide substantial capacity for regional events. The hangars lining Flatbush Avenue would be readapted for use as recreation facilities and as an aviation museum.

The focus of the plan was to expand Floyd Bennett Field's role by providing new and different recreational experiences, while preserving the site's important cultural, historic and natural resources. The design for the large open space area organized the existing elements: roads, runways, grasslands, and hangars. These elements were overlaid with a series of concentric rings that radiate from the symbolic center of the site, the control tower and National Park Service headquarters. The concentric rings define foot-trails of increasing



FLATBUSH AVENUE ENTRY ROAD



DESIGN PROPOSAL, AERIAL PERSPECTIVE

distance and duration. These paths would penetrate gardens and spaces, both indoor and outdoor.

In these spaces, the abundance and diversity of America's cultural and natural resources would be displayed. In plans, resource themes include technology, cultural arts, natural resources, transportation and energy. Industrial artifacts and technological hardware would be used to build recreational equipment. Each was designed with a sculptural aesthetic so that the pieces themselves would be visually, as well as physically, stimulating.

Together, the elements in the proposed design could support an increased program of activities, which in turn would make the recreational facilities at Floyd Bennett Field more widely used by the large and diverse nearby population. In many ways, Floyd Bennett Field exemplifies the Gateway National Recreation Area's special problems and opportunities: location, size, diversity, history, and enormous potential use. It is fitting that this unit, the most accessible, be seen as Gateway's central recreational facility.



Conclusion

Gateway National Recreation Area symbolizes the potential role of all the outer harbor lands as a unique recreational and natural environment—a mediating place between the city and the ocean. The people of the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area have an opportunity to reclaim these edges of the outer harbor, and the National Park Service can be a central contributor to this effort. This study demonstrates some strategies by which this might be accomplished. By making Gateway more accessible, identifying it as part of a single, linked system along the city's edge, designing the individual units to reflect these larger linkages and by bringing each site to its best possible use, Gateway can fulfill its role as a recreation area of national significance.

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